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Central Intelligence Agency

Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

29 July 1987

Soviet Reaction to Libya's Venture in Chad

Summary

Moscow has become more critical of Libya's involvement in Chad with each intrusion. In 1980, when the Libyans first entered Chad, the Soviets seemed to show some interest in the potential political benefits for them of having a Libyan-backed leftist regime in charge in N'djamena. They regard Qadhafi's most recent debacle, however, as a liability, and it has become a source of additional strain in the USSR-Libyan relationship. With the diminished likelihood of a Libyan success in installing a leftist regime, private Soviet comments about Tripoli's Chad policy have become more negative, and Moscow's media and diplomatic support have become increasingly grudging. The Soviets are primarily concerned that Libyan meddling in Chad will provide France and the United States with the opportunity for an increased military presence. The anti-Qadhafi backlash in the region--the conflict's other negative aspect from Moscow's viewpoint--puts a limit on the degree of direct public backing the Soviets are willing to give Tripoli. [redacted]

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Libya's Chad policy is but one facet of Soviet-Libyan relations. We believe that, on balance, the benefits of ties with Libya--a platform for Soviet IL-38 reconnaissance aircraft, Libyan oil which the Soviets sell for hard currency, Qadhafi's anti-Americanism, and his support on some other issues--outweigh such negative aspects as Qadhafi's unpredictability and his troublemaking. Although Moscow puts up with some Libyan policies which it does not endorse, the Soviets have reportedly made it clear to Qadhafi that they have no interests at stake in Chad and would prefer to see Tripoli pursue a more cautious policy

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This memorandum was prepared in the Office of Soviet Analysis [redacted] Comments and queries are welcome and may be addressed to the Chief, Third World Activities Division [redacted]

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there. Soviet arms sales to Libya have diminished in recent months, probably because of Tripoli's poor payment record and possibly the completion of major equipment deliveries under most existing contracts, but the magnitude of Qadhafi's recent defeats--including the abandonment and compromise of \$1 billion worth of Soviet military equipment during the Libyan army's hasty retreat in north Chad--may give Moscow another reason to hold down arms sales to Libya. The fact that some of this equipment has become available for the first time to the West could give Moscow second thoughts about supplying Qadhafi with more sophisticated systems. [redacted]

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Introduction

Moscow's main interest in Chad is whether Libyan meddling there affects more important Soviet interests in key neighboring countries such as Nigeria and Sudan, and more broadly in the region. In the early 1980s Moscow probably saw a potential gain in the successes of the Libyan-backed Goukouni against his rival, then rebel leader Habre. Moscow clearly hoped that, with Libya's help, Goukouni would put down the rebellion and consolidate a leftist regime in the Chadian capital of N'djamena. The Kremlin may have calculated that this would reduce French influence, enhance the role of the Soviet Union as a regional player, and give Moscow an increased ability to monitor local developments. [redacted]

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Soviet [redacted] comments on Libyan involvement at the time were favorable. In January 1981 the Soviet press reported with apparent approval Tripoli's plan to merge Libya and Chad into one state and referred to an "official request" of the Chadian government for Libya to send military personnel to Chad to safeguard security and peace. The Secretary General of the Organization of African Unity told American Embassy officials in Addis Ababa that two Soviet Embassy officers had mentioned to him a proposed massive Soviet assistance program to Chad. They said the new dependence of Chad on foreign troops represented an opportunity that should be seized. [redacted]

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[redacted] By 1983, when the conflict flared up again, Libya was no longer backing an established regime, since rebel leader Habre had overthrown Goukouni in 1982. Moreover, Libyan involvement in Chad had become an East-West issue, creating concern in Moscow that the conflict could lead to a superpower confrontation. This was reflected by a shift from the Soviet media's earlier supportive portrayal of Libya's presence in Chad as a stabilizing factor to a more alarmist propaganda line attacking Western involvement.

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[redacted] With cooling African reaction to Qadhafi's meddling in Sudan, Egypt, and the Central African Republic, and his mining of the Red Sea, by 1983 the Soviets probably saw only negative consequences for them in the region if they backed Libya then.

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The Soviet media did give pro forma support by repeatedly attacking French and US "interference" and denying Libyan involvement. Following a press campaign with heightened coverage of Chadian events, on 13 July 1983 Pravda ran a TASS statement "resolutely condemning imperialist intervention" in Chad and supporting the Organization of African Unity's efforts toward a political solution. Soviet diplomats condemned "outside interference," and called on the UN Security Council to support Tripoli's position. But these efforts resembled more a reluctant "paying of dues" than any active Soviet interest in the opportunities which Libyan meddling in Chad might afford.

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Perfunctory Support This Time Around

In 1987 Soviet media coverage of events in Chad has reflected Moscow's primary concern--that the conflict could lead to an expanded French or US military presence, or even escalate into an East-West confrontation. The Soviets have conveyed this concern in private to Tripoli as well, according to US Embassy reporting. There has been no enthusiastic backing for Tripoli's Chad policy.

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Moscow's lukewarm public support for Libya's Chad venture has avoided reference to a Libyan presence there and has sometimes been deliberately vague in its attacks on "foreign" interference. This vagueness apparently is designed to give the Soviets an opening to criticize Libyan involvement in Chad as well as that of Western powers. Although an official TASS statement in December 1986 attacked France and the United States by name, a Soviet official told a US Embassy official in Moscow that the call for an end to outside intervention was meant to caution Tripoli as well as Washington and Paris. [redacted]

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In April 1987 Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Vorontsov visited Tripoli [redacted] in an ostensible show of support for Libya. [redacted]

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[redacted] Soviet press coverage of the visit echoed other recent lukewarm statements on Tripoli's Chad policy by expressing solidarity with the Libyan people--rather than with Qadhafi--and stressing the need for a peaceful solution and an end to foreign intervention. From Tripoli, Vorontsov went to Algeria, where he discussed Chad and, according to embassy reporting, the need for a political settlement, but one that would speak to Libyan interests. [redacted]

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To avoid a serious rupture in their relationship with Libya, the Soviets are trying to give Qadhafi at least the impression that they are backing his Chad policy. [redacted]

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[redacted] The technical support the Soviets are providing to Libyan forces in Chad is part of Moscow's routine advisory assistance to the Libyan military and is not specifically motivated by Libya's Chad venture. [redacted]

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The Kremlin is irritated at Tripoli's failure to keep it informed about what is going on and at the amount of military equipment left behind in Chad. [redacted]

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New Factors in the Equation

Under Gorbachev the Kremlin appears to have adopted a more cost-conscious approach toward arms sales and economic assistance to its traditional allies. Moscow will seek to avoid losing any of the influence it has with such radical states as Libya and Syria by continuing arms sales, but Gorbachev publicly told Syrian President Assad in April that defensive rather than offensive weapons were to have priority in future arms transfers and that Moscow favored political rather than military solutions to regional conflicts. [REDACTED]

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The Soviets have shown increasing reluctance to be seen as playing an aggressive role in conflicts in the Middle East and instead are promoting a "peacebroker" image.¹ For example, they have dusted off their longstanding proposal for an international conference to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, and Gorbachev told Syria's President Asad in April that the solution of problems in the Middle East by force had been completely discredited. In order for the peacebroker posture to be effective, Moscow probably sees a need to create an impression of distance between itself and the policies of radical allies like Qadhafi. [REDACTED] comments by Soviet officials to Third World and Western diplomats that arms sales to Libya do not translate into Soviet influence there and that Moscow has little control over Tripoli's policies. These assessments are probably true, at least where Qadhafi perceives Libya's most important interests to be at stake. But they also serve the purpose of distancing Moscow from Libyan meddling in Chad. [REDACTED]

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Reaction elsewhere in the region to Qadhafi's ventures has become increasingly negative in recent years, making association with him an even greater liability for Soviet diplomacy. Given

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the animosity between Egyptian President Mubarak and Qadhafi, for example, Moscow's current hope of gradually regaining some of its former influence in Egypt makes it more awkward for the Kremlin to support Tripoli's African adventures. In addition, even some of the USSR's closest friends in Africa, such as Ethiopia's Mengistu and Angola's dos Santos, regard Qadhafi with suspicion and would probably not object to a leadership change in Tripoli. Many neutral or pro-Western African countries see Soviet-Libyan ties as a patron-client relationship which implicates Moscow in Qadhafi's regional subversion tactics. As early as February 1981 an article appeared in the Senegalese press claiming there were Soviet technicians in N'djamena. Nigeria expelled a Soviet diplomat in March 1981 for violating restrictions on travel near Nigeria's border with Chad. [redacted]

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The compromise of Soviet military equipment is undoubtedly especially galling to Moscow. Although the Soviets quickly replaced Libya's equipment losses and improved its air defense capabilities following the April 1986 US air raid on Tripoli and Benghazi, they have repeatedly turned down Libyan requests for additional new equipment. Strains over Tripoli's dilatory payments on its military debt probably were paramount in the USSR's decision to go slowly on major deliveries last year. The equipment compromised in Chad--unnecessarily, in Moscow's view--will provide the Soviets with an additional reason to keep a tight rein on new deliveries. [redacted]

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In addition to the compromise of technology, the Libyan Army's abandonment of Soviet military equipment has given the Soviets other reasons to be unhappy with Tripoli's Chad venture. Some of the discovered hardware will enable the West to link Libya to various terrorist acts. The [redacted]

[redacted] for example, reported in the US press, has indicated that captured hand [redacted]

[redacted] used in the September 1985 Cafe de Paris attack in Rome, the November 1985 Air Egypt hijacking in Malta, the December 1985 airport attacks in Vienna and Rome, and the April 1986 thwarted attack against the United States Air Force officers' club in Ankara. In addition, Middle East and African countries undoubtedly will make unfavorable comparisons between Qadhafi's Soviet equipment and Habre's French and US armaments. [redacted]

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Tripoli's View of Soviet Support

Qadhafi has tried for nearly four years to get Moscow more actively involved in Chad. In August 1983 the Libyan media reported that Qadhafi sent a message to General Secretary Andropov on "the situation in the region." At the same time, according to Western media reports, a Libyan military delegation

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visited Moscow. Soviet media made no mention of either the message or the Libyan delegation. [redacted]

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Conclusion

As a source of strain in the USSR-Libyan relationship, Tripoli's Chad policy is probably less annoying to Moscow than issues that more directly affect Soviet interests. Moscow and Tripoli have had periodic disagreements over the price of Libyan oil, and earlier this year Tripoli cut off shipments for several months in response. The Soviets would like Libya to support their proposal for an international conference on the Arab-Israeli conflict, but Tripoli has not done so thus far. Tripoli's transfers--without consulting Moscow--of Soviet-supplied arms to Iran, North Yemen, and Sudan are another source of irritation to the USSR [redacted]

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[redacted] Qadhafi's backing for indiscriminate acts of terrorism in Western Europe and his erratic and heavy-handed behavior in dealing with other Third World countries have caused Moscow to keep its distance from some of Tripoli's policies. [redacted]

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On the other hand, even with the additional strains in the relationship from Libya's war in Chad, we believe the costs of association with Qadhafi still do not outweigh the benefits, in Moscow's view. The Soviets get hard currency from selling Libyan oil, in repayment for Soviet goods and services, and a platform for Soviet IL-38 reconnaissance aircraft engaged in intelligence-gathering missions against NATO fleets in the western Mediterranean. They also get political benefits such as Qadhafi's anti-American posture and his recent support in reconciling factions of the PLO. [redacted]

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[redacted]

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The Libyan Army's abandonment of Soviet equipment in particular has raised further questions about future Soviet arms sales to Tripoli. Soviet reluctance to provide arms to Qadhafi is already one of the main sources of strain in the relationship. From the summer of 1986 until well after fighting in Chad died down in the spring of 1987, arms sales were at very low levels and involved mainly spare parts and refurbished older equipment. The only major transfers of new military equipment to Tripoli during this period were a minesweeper and a small frigate--items which do not help Tripoli in Chad and are unlikely to be involved in terrorist acts or in unconsulted transfers to third countries. [redacted]

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It is not yet clear how much of the equipment lost in Chad the Soviets will be willing to replace. [redacted]

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[redacted] In early June a Soviet Foreign Ministry official told the US Embassy in Moscow that the Libyans had agreed [redacted] to settle arrears on arms payments by oil shipments, removing an obstacle to "economic cooperation."

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